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Ex-Congressman Tom Garrett accused of abuse in bitter divorce proceedings

Jason Armesto Aug 9, 2023 0



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divorce proceedings, with court filings claiming the Republican strangled Sheridan, attempted suicide and thought of ways to kill his chief of staff. In a 2019 complaint filed by Garrett, his counsel wrote that Sheridan abandoned him “without just cause or provocation.”



Republican Tom Garrett kisses his wife Flanna as they celebrate a win in Virginia's 5th Congressional District over Democrat Jane Dittmar in 2016. ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

A counterclaim by Sheridan's counsel includes a long list of allegations against her husband, including that he “is guilty of both physical and emotional abuse.”

Garrett, who won the GOP nomination and will almost certainly be elected to the heavily Republican 56th District's seat in the Virginia House of Delegates this fall, has denied nearly all the claims.

More than 1,000 pages organized into five thick folders at the Louisa County Courthouse document the ugly allegations.

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The Republican nominee's counsel has submitted a motion for a gag order, asserting his wife was engaged “in a campaign to discredit and criticize” him.



In a sworn affidavit, one witness writes that Sheridan told her “that she wanted to ruin Tom, bankrupt him, take all of his money, and do anything she could to prevent him from making money.”

In Sheridan’s counterclaim, her counsel outlines a number of violent incidents.



LOCAL NEWS

Garrett, on comeback trail, wins GOP nomination in House District 56

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Among them are allegations that Garrett twice struck her in the head during their marriage and that he “has a history of physically pinning [Sheridan] to the ground, pushing her, and punching holes in the walls.”

The counterclaim also alleges that the politician often threatened suicide.

In August 2017, for instance, Sheridan, who was eight months pregnant at the time, went for a 30-minute walk to take a breather from an argument she was having with her husband, the counterclaim says.

When she returned home, she said she found Garrett in the car with the engine running and the garage door sealed.



Republican Rep. Tom Garrett of Virginia's 5th District talks during a town hall meeting in Moneta on May 9, 2017.

LATHAN GOUMAS, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

“I told you I was going to kill myself if you left (go for the walk),” the filing claims Garrett said. His counsel denies this.



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His political career was put on pause in May 2018 when he announced that he is an alcoholic and that he would not run for reelection.

“Life is about priorities and values, and for the most part, I am proud of mine. But there’s one area where I haven’t been honest,” Garrett said in a video announcement at the time, visibly choked up. “The tragedy is that any person, Republican, Democrat or independent, who has known me any period of time and has any integrity knows two things: I am a good man and I am an alcoholic.”



Rep. Garrett announces he is an alcoholic and will not seek re-election

By Laura Vozzella and Jenna Portnoy The Washington Post

Both parties in the recent legal proceedings agree that Garrett stopped drinking at that time. But what triggered that decision depends on who is telling the story.

In Sheridan’s telling, it was Mother’s Day 2018, and the family was on a trip to New Orleans. Garrett “drank himself into a fiery rage,” her counterclaim reads, and then tried to strangle her as their infant daughter was sleeping next to her.



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“In a long line of physical and emotional abuses by Husband against Wife, that apparently prompted Husband to publicly announce he was seeking treatment for his alcoholism,” reads the counterclaim.

Garrett, however, says the last night he touched alcohol was some 10 days later, when he fired his then-chief of staff.



Republican U.S.

“I still have not had so much as one drink since the night that I fired Jimmy Keady,” Garrett responded in court documents, adding that he terminated Keady because Keady “hated Flanna and she hated him.”

A person familiar with the matter told The Daily Progress that Keady was not fired but resigned.

The next spring, nearly one year after Garrett claims to have stopped drinking, he and Sheridan were traveling together in Belgrade, Serbia.

There, according to Sheridan’s filing, he disclosed to her that he was thinking of ways to kill Keady because he “blamed him for ruining his political career.” That same day, Garrett “threatened to jump off the balcony” at a Serbian shopping mall, according to the filing.



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Garrett’s counsel denied both allegations.



5th District Republicans to pick new nominee Saturday to replace Rep. Tom Garrett

By Amy Friedenberger amy.friedenberger @roanoke.com 981-3356

In explaining his exit from Congress, Garrett wrote in a court filing that after he fired Keady, his ex-chief of staff “concocted a story which ran in Politico.”

That May 2018 story is headlined: “Ex-aides say congressman made them his servants.” In it, Politico reported that the Garretts assigned aides “mundane” tasks such as grocery shopping and caring for their dog.

“The Majority Leader called me prior of me even knowing about the story to say he could help if any bad things came to pass,” Garrett wrote in his filing. “This is essentially how I learned of the accusations.”

At the time the story was published, the U.S. House and Senate were in Republican hands: Paul Ryan of Wisconsin leading the lower chamber, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky leading the upper.



Republican 5th District candidate Tom Garrett, right, answers a question next to Democratic 5th District candidate Jane Dittmar, left, during a debate in the Dickerson Center at Piedmont Virginia Community College.

ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

In its motion for a gag order, Garrett’s counsel wrote there was “good cause to seal the court’s file, so that the contents therein are not available to members of the public or the press.”



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With no gag order, his counsel said it was concerned Garrett’s “ability to obtain future employment will be negatively affected.”

The general election will take place this November. Currently there is no Democrat challenging Garrett in his district, according to the Virginia Public Access Project.



The Richmond Times-Dispatch At the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial in Capitol Square in November, former U.S. Rep. Tom Garrett announces his comeback bid for a House of Delegates seat.

ALEXA WELCH EDLUND, TIMES-DISPATCH

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POLITICS

Garrett campaign donors footed bill for travel, hotel where alleged assault occurred

Jason Armesto Aug 13, 2023 0



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When then-Congressman Tom Garrett allegedly strangled his wife on Mother's Day, he did so on a trip funded by campaign donors.

In a counterclaim filed by his wife Flanna Sheridan in the couple's divorce proceedings, her counsel claims that after he "drank himself into a fiery rage," he began to strangle Sheridan in a hotel bed as their infant daughter was sleeping next to her.



POLITICS

Ex-Congressman Tom Garrett accused of abuse in bitter divorce proceedings

Jason Armesto

"Flanna was absolutely terrified," a person familiar with the situation who agreed to speak anonymously said to The Daily Progress, adding that staffers in the Republican's office were told of the incident. "He came back from a party, she was there and she woke up with him on top of her strangling her."

A second person familiar with the incident, who again agreed to speak so long as their name was not used, told The Daily Progress that the alleged assault occurred in the early morning on Mother's Day and that Sheridan chose not to file a police report.

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"She was trying to protect him like a wife does. She thought she'd get him help, and she was trying to heal the marriage," that person said. "But it happened, and I believe her and her stories never change."



The alleged incident occurred in New Orleans in May 2018.

Documents obtained by The Daily Progress show that Garrett, then a U.S. representative for Virginia's 5th District and now the Republican candidate for the 56th District seat in the state House of Delegates, was there on official business, and FEC filings indicate the trip was paid for by the Tom Garrett For Congress campaign.

The campaign purchased tickets with American Airlines for \$991.41 each on May 3, according to FEC filings.



LOCAL NEWS

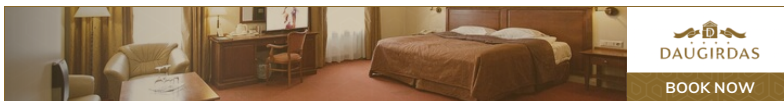
Garrett, on comeback trail, wins GOP nomination in House District 56

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An American Airlines receipt obtained by The Daily Progress shows purchases for that same amount were made under Garrett and Sheridan's name for a round trip flight from Washington to New Orleans. The scheduled return date was May 13, 2018.

Another document that appears to be a travel itinerary compiled by congressional staffers shows Garrett and Sheridan were scheduled to stay at a Hampton Inn from May 10 to May 13. Garrett's campaign was charged on May 15 for lodging at a Hampton Inn, and a hotel receipt obtained by The Daily Progress shows a reservation for two adults and one child with a May 10 check-in.



Based on those receipts and court documents as well as the two people familiar with the incident, that appears to be the hotel where the alleged assault occurred.

An email and a flyer indicate Garrett was in town for a fundraiser and to speak at a panel during MJBizConNext, a cannabis business conference. Garrett was one of few Republicans at the time to advocate for marijuana legalization.



Rep. Garrett announces he is an alcoholic and will not seek re-election

By Laura Vozzella and Jenna Portnoy The Washington Post

Chris West ran a government relations firm at the time and told The Daily Progress that putting a fundraiser together for Garrett was his idea. West drove Garrett and his wife all across that city that weekend.

"I was with the both of them, however long they were in town," he said. "I remember driving him, his wife and a really tiny baby."

In court filings, Sheridan's counsel wrote that their daughter was less than one year old at the time of the assault.

It is not clear why Sheridan was brought on a trip that was paid for with campaign funds. But if the allegations are true, Garrett's donors foot the bill for the flight to New Orleans and the hotel in which the assault occurred.



CHARLOTTESVILLE NEWS

Report: Garrett ethics investigations launched

The Daily Progress staff

In a 2019 report, the House Ethics Committee described how Garrett did not take



According to the committee's investigation, Garrett had his staffers help him move apartments, take his car for an oil change and spend hours assisting his wife during shopping trips among other "numerous requests to staff to perform errands and other tasks that were personal in nature."

"Moreover, this pattern continued even after Representative Garrett was specifically advised of relevant rules and regulations by the Committee's advice and education staff," the report reads.

"His personal life was pretty intertwined with the office. I think anybody will tell you that," a person who was familiar with the situation, who again agreed to speak anonymously, told The Daily Progress.

Staff was "picking up dry cleaning and driving his daughters around. He used the office as an extension of his personal life," that individual said.



The person also added that, as established in the committee's report, Garrett often drank in the office.

"There was plenty of drinking. He admitted that he was an alcoholic and that might be true, but it was also convenient timing," the person said. "That was the excuse for why he was stepping down instead of the scandal about misusing the staff."

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POLITICS

Republican strategy for Garrett fallout: Don't say a word

Jason Armesto Sep 4, 2023 3



Republican Tom Garrett kisses his wife Flanna as they celebrate a win in Virginia's 5th Congressional District over Democrat Jane Dittmar in 2016. ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS





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Jason Armesto

What does a party do when its candidate is accused of strangling his wife and plotting to murder his chief of staff?

Nothing, for now.

In court filings from his bitter divorce proceeding, Republican Tom Garrett, a former Virginia representative in Washington and now a candidate running unopposed for the 56th District seat in the Virginia House of Delegates, is alleged to have physically abused his wife, frequently threatened suicide, and spoken of a desire to kill his former chief of staff.



POLITICS

Ex-Congressman Tom Garrett accused of abuse in bitter divorce proceedings

Jason Armesto

Two sources familiar with the situation corroborated one of the assault allegations, telling The Daily Progress that Garrett did indeed attempt to strangle his wife Flanna Sheridan on a New Orleans hotel room bed, as is detailed in a court filing.

Garrett has denied the claims.

While some local supporters have rallied behind their candidate, Republican officials aren't exactly rushing to his aid. Instead, they're avoiding comment altogether.

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"That is the smart way to do it," Chaz Nuttycombe, director of CNalysis, a group that specializes in predicting state legislative elections, told The Daily Progress. "When you are stuck with someone on your ticket that you need to win, you want to just ignore their baggage and hope that people stop paying attention to it."

With the House majority possibly hanging in the balance, the Republican Party of Virginia really does need Garrett to win.

Currently, Republicans control the House with a narrow 49-46 lead. Recent redistricting gives Democrats a prime opportunity to retake the majority, and CNalysis slightly favors them to do just that. Republicans risk retaining the House if they lose the conservative bastion that is the 56th District, which includes Appomattox, Buckingham and Cumberland counties as well as parts of Fluvanna,

Goochland, Prince Edward and Louisa counties, where Gov. Glenn Younkin beat out his Democratic opponent former Gov. Terry McAuliffe with 64.9 of the vote. And since he secured the nomination months ago, beating out two other candidates in the Republican primary, his party may feel it has little option but to ride it out.



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“Once everything has been filed to the state and the primary period has passed, there really isn’t much the party can do to remove him from the ballot other than political pressure,” a former state Republican Party official, who agreed to speak under the condition of anonymity, told The Daily Progress. “The fact that he is the nominee after f—cking up so much in such spectacular public fashion is kind of in and of itself a miracle for him.”

The official was referring to Garrett’s time in the U.S. Congress, a single-term that resulted in the Ethics Committee investigating him and finding that Garrett frequently drank in office, used official resources for personal needs and hindered the investigation.



POLITICS

Tom Garrett seeks to prevent medical records from going public

Jason Armesto

“Representative Garrett’s response to the Committee’s investigation demonstrates his failure to appreciate the extent and severity of his misuse of official resources or the Committee’s lawful jurisdiction over his conduct,” the official report reads.

Garrett chose not to run for reelection, announcing in an emotional video that he is an alcoholic.



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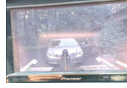
After publishing stories about the many allegations made against Garrett in divorce proceedings, The Daily Progress reached out to Republican House leadership in Richmond.

“I bet they didn’t return your calls,” predicted Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia’s Center for Politics.

Pretty much.

Del. Mike Webert of Fauquier, who serves as whip of the Republican House Caucus, did in fact pick up the phone. So did Garren Shipley, director of communications for Speaker of the House Todd Gilbert of Shenandoah.

But both declined to comment, claiming they were not familiar with the allegations against Garrett. The Daily Progress followed up, sending each of them a link to a story outlining the accusations against their soon-to-be colleague. Neither Webert nor Shipley responded.



POLITICS

Video shows moment truck arrived to tow Tom Garrett's car while wife, child were inside

Jason Armesto

Similarly, Gilbert himself and House Majority Leader Terry Kilgore of Gate City did not respond to a request for comment from The Daily Progress.



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Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin's office referred The Daily Progress to the Spirit of Virginia, his campaign's political action committee. The PAC did not return requests for comments from The Daily Progress. Neither did the Republican Party of Virginia.

"You can be sure they're discussing it. Whenever they won't talk to you, you know they're discussing it," Sabato said.

"Generally speaking, public officials don't return calls when it's an unpleasant subject and they can't give an answer to make them look good," Sabato continued. "There's nothing you can say about this except, 'No comment.'"

In a year when suburban women could help decide elections statewide, having a candidate accused of domestic abuse puts the party in a difficult predicament.

"They're in a shitty situation. I'm sympathetic," the former party official said of Virginia Republicans. "They need to be focusing on winning a bunch of districts that voted heavily for Joe Biden and that Youngkin narrowly won by winning over suburban moms. And then you got Tom Garrett going and being accused of choking out his wife."



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Darrell Byers, chairman of the Fluvanna Republican Committee, a county Garrett will represent if he takes office, said local Republicans are sticking with the man who won the Republican nomination.



LOCAL NEWS

Garrett, on comeback trail, wins GOP nomination in House District 56
again

"He's the candidate that's going to be on the ballot on Nov. 7 and Fluvanna is going to stand behind Tom until something indicates we shouldn't," Byers told The Daily Progress.

"These are very serious allegations, but that's all they are right now, is allegations," he said. "Tom has been in Richmond before. I know how he's going to vote and he's going to vote the way we want him to vote."

It's possible, if not likely, that another conservative would also deliver votes that please 56th District Republicans. But with the primary in the rearview mirror, the

simplest way for the party to replace Garrett with a baggage-free candidate would be for Garrett to resign.

That seems unlikely. After all, the former congressman is in the midst of a political comeback.

“It’s amazing they want to hang on the way they do, but it’s their salvation to some degree, it’s how they see it,” Sabato said. “They’re public people and without a title in front of their name they have a hard time functioning.”



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One person who knows Garrett from previous political campaigns worries about the candidate’s well-being.

“I like Tom when Tom can be Tom, but Tom running for House is not healthy for him. I really wish he could deal with this elsewhere,” the person told The Daily Progress. “I hope he wrestles his demons and comes out on top, but what he’s doing right now is. ... He just needs to get out of this thing.”



POLITICS

Garrett campaign donors footed bill for travel, hotel where alleged assault occurred

Jason Armesto

While the party can’t force Garrett to resign, it could pressure him by refusing to finance his campaign. But it appears that’s already happened.

When Garrett first ran for state senate in 2011, the Republican Party of Virginia donated nearly \$250,000 to his campaign. This cycle, it hasn’t donated a single dollar to Garrett, although three separate Republican groups did give him \$7,400 before the primary, according to the Virginia Public Access Project.

Elected Republicans could rally behind another candidate to challenge Garrett via a write-in campaign. Something similar has happened before.

In 2011, Republican Bill Janis chose not to seek reelection to the House of Delegates and instead chose to run for Henrico County commonwealth’s attorney, challenging Republican Matthew Geary in the general election. Geary had admitted to having an extramarital affair, and Republican leaders from across the state, including then-U.S. Speaker of the House Eric Cantor, chose to rally around Janis, who ran as an independent.

A Democrat ended up winning, likely aided by the Republican split.

With the House majority at stake, the party may not want to take that risk. Instead, it appears to be avoiding any discussion of Garrett’s apparent transgressions.

“If this were a very competitive district he’d be in deep trouble,” Sabato said. “Ten years ago, pre-Trump, I’d say he was dead as doornail. But in this era, nothing kills

anybody for sure.”



LOCAL NEWS

Report: Garrett misused staff time for personal errands

By Tyler Hammel

Without a resignation, Garrett appears on track to sail to victory. Youngkin won 65% of the vote in the district, and this time around, Democrats didn't even nominate a candidate.

“We'd have a nonzero chance of winning if we had a candidate. We have a zero percent chance without one,” a Democratic Party of Virginia official told The Daily Progress under the condition of anonymity.

“I've seen literal child molesters get elected to state legislatures in districts that are purple. Tom Garrett has a crimson red district,” Nuttycombe said. “It wouldn't matter if Jesus Christ ran as a Democrat against him. Garrett would win.”

If Garrett does face any political repercussions, they would likely come after the election and would depend on who wins the majority.

The former Republican Party official believes that if Democrats win the House, Republicans will “kick Garrett to the curb.” Without control of the chamber, they won't need his vote.

“If they keep the majority they'll give him some really crappy committee assignments,” the person said.

Either way, that person expects the party to primary Garrett when he's up for reelection and rally behind his opponents.

“It's not a matter of whether Tom Garrett's political career is over,” the former official said. “It's if he will survive two years before he comes before voters and it's over again.”



Garrett

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